



**National Marine Fisheries Service
Southwest Region**

NEWS RELEASE

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IMMEDIATE RELEASE

4/29/99

Fisheries Service Announces Public Hearings on Proposed Critical Habitat for Steelhead

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) will conduct a series of six public hearings in California regarding a proposed rule to designate critical habitat for four evolutionarily significant units (ESUs), or distinct populations, of steelhead listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act, the Service announced today. (See attached hearing schedule.) The Service is also extending the public comment period on the proposal by 60 days from May 6, 1999. Comments are now due by July 5, 1999.

The four ESUs are the California Central Valley, Central California coast, South-Central California coast, and Southern California coast. (See atch'd maps) "Comments and information from the public are really considered an essential element of the decision making process for these kinds of proposed designations," said Jim Lecky, Assistant Regional Administrator, NMFS Southwest Region. "The identification and designation of Critical Habitat is a requirement of the Endangered Species Act and as such we want to make sure we have local expertise and information that may influence the final decision." The proposed critical habitat is the freshwater and estuarine range including all waterways, substrates, and adjacent riparian zones within all ESUs.

Lecky stressed that the designation of critical habitat does not restrict activities within an area or automatically mandate any specific management or recovery actions. Rather the action identifies important areas that are essential to steelhead in their overall recovery and therefore alerts federal agencies and the public about an area's importance to the species.

NMFS is soliciting specific information, comments, data, and/or recommendations on any aspect of these proposals from all concerned parties. Public hearings provide another chance for the public to give comments, and allow exchanges of information and opinion among interested parties. There will be opportunities to give oral and written testimony at these public hearings. Those unable to attend the public hearings are encouraged to send comments to the below address. The agency will consider all information, comments, and recommendations received before it reaches final decisions on these critical habitat proposals.

For more information on these proposals, contact Craig Wingert, 562-980-4021; or Chris Mobley, 301-713-1401. Copies of the Federal Register notices and other salmon-related materials are available on the Internet at www.nwr.noaa.gov. Written comments: Chief, Protected Resources, NMFS, 525 NE Oregon St., Ste. 500, Portland, OR 97232-2737

(The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is an extension of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration of the U.S. Department of Commerce and is responsible for the management, conservation, and protection of living marine resources within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone.)

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